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For Immediate Release  
January 20, 2006

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## **Sen. Laura Toy holds town hall meeting on water rates**

**WESTLAND** – Residents upset over the perpetual water rate increases issued by the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department vented their frustrations Friday during a town hall meeting at Westland's Bailey Recreation Center.

The event was sponsored by state Senator Laura M. Toy, whose 6th district includes Garden City, Livonia, Redford Township, and Westland. Sen. Toy was joined at the hearing by Westland Mayor Sandra Cicirelli and Garden City Manager Dave Harvey.

"It's really getting to the point of ridiculous," Sen. Toy said. "Rates go up more and more every year and there's absolutely no accountability. People are on fixed incomes."

Redford Township, for example, has seen rates rise 113 percent since 1994. This compares to inflation over the same period of only 30.5 percent. This year alone, Garden City's wholesale water rate from the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department increased by 19.3 percent.

Rates in Livonia and Redford Township rose by 9.5 percent this year, while Westland saw a 5.9 percent increase.

Senator Toy's efforts to reform the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department have brought some needed change in the rate-making process, said Bob Beckley, Public Service Director for Livonia's Department of Public Works. Although things are improving, we need to keep pushing ahead and work together toward greater transparency and government accountability. This really is a regional issue.

Sen. Toy was the sponsor of legislation, vetoed by the governor in 2003, that would have created a regional authority to oversee the water department's finances. She has now introduced Senate Bill 372 and begun legislative hearings to again seek a regional authority that would provide accountability for ratepayers' money.

"Although I disagree strongly with her decision to veto my bill, I respect our governor and hope that she sees the need to take a second look at this issue, Sen. Toy said. "In my new bill, we address the concerns the governor outlined in her veto message. We need to act now because the claims of reform have just not panned out. Rates continue to increase well above the level of inflation, we still have no clear accounting of how rates are set and the types of questionable practices that have plagued the water department for 30 years continue."

Last week *The Detroit News* highlighted potential abuses by the current administration in awarding millions of dollars in no-bid contracts. Meanwhile, the city of Warren has taken the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department to federal court for refusing to disclose how it sets the rates charged to that community.

(More)

Sen. Toy plans to convene another hearing as early as next week on SB 372 in the Senate Local, Urban, and State Affairs Committee, which she chairs. While critics charge that her legislation would amount to a takeover of Detroit's water system, Sen. Toy points out that under her current legislation, as with that vetoed by the governor three years ago, Detroit would continue to own and operate the system.

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